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Indonesia: Update to IDN43347.E of 27 January 2005, IDN43329 of 20 January 2005, IDN43304.E of 13 January 2005, and IDN43291.E of 7 January 2005 on the impact of the 26 December 2004 earthquake and tsunami on the human rights situation, particularly in Aceh province
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

The Security Situation in Aceh

Several sources expressed the opinion that talks between the government of Indonesia and rebels from the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) to be held on 28 January 2005 in Helsinki (AFP 28 Jan. 2005) could mean the beginning of a peace process between the two groups, after Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono proposed extensive autonomy to the Aceh rebels in exchange for a cease-fire (ibid.; CNN 29 Jan. 2005; Laksamana.net 27 Jan. 2005; AP 28 Jan. 2005b). Hailed by the Associated Press (AP) as the "brightest hope for peace in years" (28 Jan. 2005a.), the talks were cancelled a day after they had begun (AP 29 Jan. 2005) when the government rejected a proposal made by the GAM, who said it would put on hold its demands for the sovereignty of Aceh if Jakarta agreed to a an eventual referendum on the subject (BBC 31 Jan. 2005; VOA 31 Jan. 2005), leading analysts to question the prospects of immediate peace in the region (Reuters 31 Jan. 2005; AP 31 Jan. 2005). The same day that peace talks failed in Helsinki, Indonesian soldiers killed four rebels in clashes that took place in eastern Aceh (ibid.; ibid. 30 Jan. 2005a; AFP 31 Jan. 2005a).

Sources indicated that despite the skirmishes, the government continues to seek a cease-fire (ibid.) and is planning to significantly increase its defence spending "to cope with major disasters such as the tsunami" (AP 27 Jan. 2005).

The Distribution of Aid in Aceh

According to AP, aid groups operating in Aceh did not feel that the resumption of violence between the GAM and government troops, brought on by the 29 January 2005 failure of peace talks in Helsinki, would negatively affect their work or their security in the region, since they did not expect to be targeted (31 Jan. 2005).

Agence France Presse (AFP) indicated that the coordination of relief efforts remained a problem in Aceh province because of a lack of infrastructure (1 Feb. 2005) and that "the aid effort is in chaos" (27 Jan. 2005). However, AFP also reported that food was generally well distributed and that the impact of tsunami-

related diseases was lower than expected (27 Jan. 2005). On the other hand, a UNICEF report indicated that about 12 per cent of children in Aceh province were malnourished (AP 28 Jan. 2005c). In addition, several sources mentioned that there is some concern that up to 800,000 Indonesians would need emergency food aid as a result of the tsunami (AFP 31 Jan. 2005c; AP 1 Feb. 2005). Another concern was that medical supplies continued to be lacking in Aceh province (AFP 31 Jan. 2005b; AP 30 Jan. 2005b).

Sources indicated that New Zealand bolstered its defence presence in Indonesia to assist relief operations (Xinhua 28 Jan. 2005), while Portugal offered more medical workers (ibid. 27 Jan. 2005) and the United States sent a hospital ship equipped with 1,000 beds to assist tsunami victims in Aceh (DPA 30 Jan. 2005; AFP 30 Jan. 2005).

AFP reported that the government of Indonesia is planning to create 50,000 jobs in Aceh to those who lost their livelihood in the 26 December 2004 tsunami (2 Feb. 2005).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection.

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